

# NIFC News

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## Communities Across the U.S. to Benefit from Federal Program to Reduce the Threat of Wildfires

*The initiative is funded under a \$240 million Appropriation  
approved by Congress for FY2001*

BOISE, Idaho -- In the wake of last year's severe wildfires, federal land management agencies announced today that communities across the country may benefit from a federal program to reduce the threat of wildfires. A list of all communities initially proposed to be eligible for the program by the States and Tribes will be published in the January 4 *Federal Register* and will also be available on the National Interagency Fire Center's website at [www.nifc.gov](http://www.nifc.gov).

Communities were proposed by states, tribes and local governments and lists were compiled by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. The federal land management agencies have worked with the Western Governors' Association, the National Association of State Foresters, and others to develop initial definitions and criteria to identify communities that will benefit from special attention to reduce wildland fire hazards. Accordingly, the list will be refined as additional information is submitted to the federal agencies and the agreed-upon criteria are applied.

The preliminary list includes communities located in what fire officials call the "urban wildland interface" -- those communities that are near public lands managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, and by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Fish and Wildlife Service.

"We now have an opportunity to move forward with a new focus on wildland fire policy that emphasizes the urban/wildland interface," said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. "Congress has provided important new funding to back this important program."

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The need to reduce fuels, especially in urban interface areas, was identified in *Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President*, which the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture submitted to the White House this past year. Other initiatives underway include restoring and rehabilitating areas damaged by this year's wildfires, ensuring federal firefighting forces are fully prepared for future wildfire seasons and working closely with local rural fire districts to enhance local firefighting efforts. Congress funded and directed the agencies to undertake these initiatives as part of the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior and Related Agencies appropriations act.

Specific actions to reduce the threats of wildfires will vary. In some areas, for example, contracts may be offered to thin dense stands of trees or prescribed burns used to reduce excessive undergrowth. In other areas, actions may be taken to remove non-native plant species that increase fire danger.

The list includes both communities where hazardous fuels reduction treatments are already underway and those where treatments are slated for Fiscal Year 2001.

Fire experts note that individuals themselves can take some actions immediately to thwart fires. For example, the creation of areas of defensible space around homes located in high risk areas has long been recommended. The defensible space should be thinned of brush, small trees, and any other material that could lead a fire from the surrounding trees to the home. In addition, home owners should make certain that wood piles are located at least 30 feet from any structure, and that roofing and other building materials are fire resistant.

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